

## **In Dreams** by Frankiebee89

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**Summary:** During their senior year, Mike is saddened to feel his friendships drifting apart. When the mysterious girl from his dreams turns out to be real and in desperate need of his help, Mike must gather the party to save her. High school AU.

## 1. chapter 1

Mike Wheeler is having the best dream. The kind of dream that never lasts long enough, the kind he never wants to wake from.

Small hands stroke up his abdomen as the figure of a girl snakes down, and he's naked and hard and that tight coil of pleasure in his pelvis so, so intense. Dark curls, perfect to tangle his hands in, poised above him and he bites back a groan of lusty anticipation. Warmth, wet and soft on the underside of his cock as hands seem to touch him everywhere at once. His eyes roll back, his back arches.

Look up, look up, he pleads mentally, wishing to see the face belonging to this enchanting dream girl. She's haunting him, nightly, starring in all of his unconscious fantasies like some kind of conjured up porno star.

When he's awake, all he can remember is the sense of it all; the smell of vanilla and pine, smoke and syrup. Soft, silken skin under his fingertips, loose curls tickling over his thighs or chest or neck. The taste of copper from biting his cheek so hard. A tinkling giggle or sigh or quiet moan that stirs something deep inside of him, something he can't put a finger on...

The pleasure is almost painful, it's so intense. She's bobbing over him, using her mouth to make the soles of his feet burn and toes to curl. Fists grasp at bedsheets, pulling them off the mattress and sweat runs down his neck. It's so good, it's too good, he can't hold on. With a guttural groan, Mike finishes and then the alarm is ringing shrilly and his mother is knocking on his door and he swears under his breath as he blinks awake. There is a warm, sticky mess in his briefs and he is disappointed again.

One of these days, he thinks, tossing back his sheets and peeling off his spikes pajamas and underwear. I'll see her face and then I can find her.

But it's just a dream, and as he stands in the shower and the warm water rinses the remnants of his nightly activities, the dreams fades and thoughts of reality crash in on him. By the time he's backing out

of the driveway, Bob Seger on the radio and an Eggo in one hand, Mike Wheeler has forgotten.

"Wow, Wheeler. Really wowing is with this sweater collection," Maxine Mayfield says once he reaches his locker. The redhead has grown tall and, if possible, even more snarky since she moved to Hawkins in eighth grade. "Does your mom still dress you?"

"Shut it," he grumbles as he spins the dial on his locker combination. Mike has a million things to worry about today, dealing with Max is at the very bottom of the list. However, her boyfriend Lucas is his partner for the chemistry final, and he does need to speak with him. Glancing around, he realizes that Lucas is nowhere to be found. "Where's your better half?"

Max sighs dramatically and leans back against the wall of metal doors, painted white and blue. "Lucas has left me for someone younger, someone dumber..."

"So he's in the AV room with Dustin?"

Max's grin is dazzling and full of amusement. She nods.

"Well, see you in soc," Mike says. Notebooks and textbooks under one arm, he slams the locker shut and leaves her standing alone. Max sighs and pushes off, weaving her way through the crowded hallway and becoming a flash of copper in the crowd.

Mike finds his three best friends in the small room where all of the technology the school owns is kept under lock and key. Being club president, Mike has his own copy to the door, and somehow - he suspects Dustin Henderson, naturally - the others have copies too. It makes being president feel sort of pointless, since that power is now shared... Mike is just glad they're all still in it, together. They've changed a lot since seventh grade.

"Late," Lucas says, not glancing up from the sheets of notes in his hands. They are marked and highlighted so much it's like one glaring, neon yellow paper.

"Yeah, sorry. So," he says, pulling up a stool to the table. The

Heathkit is still there, though their fascination has long since waned, and added to it is a new VCR they've taken apart. Will is fiddling with one of the heads and Dustin is twirling a mini screwdriver between his thick, calloused fingers.

"I'm late," Lucas says suddenly, jolting uptight.

"But the chem final -"

"Meet me in the library at lunch. I'm sorry, I have a trig test first period -" And then he was gone, leaving Mike with a frown and the feeling that something was wrong.

Sure, he's been distracted this year. It's their senior year, they're all distracted. Will's working with his mom at the store, stocking shelves and mopping floors, and when he's not there he's usually at home, working on a new piece or sketching. Dustin has developed a strange obsession with metal and amphibians, so when he's not hanging around the various ponds and swamps he's at home trying to teach himself guitar. Even Lucas is busy! Between Max and football, he barely has time to sleep and study. Mike feels an ache in his stomach, a pang of sadness that they're all growing up and branching out in different directions. It felt like just yesterday, they were all in his basement playing Dungeons and Dragons, waiting with baited breath to see what the dice would reveal...

"Don't worry about him," Dustin says after a few beats, breaking Mike's train of thought. "Max is on her rag. That always makes him grouchy."

"Gross," Will says, frowning up at him.

Still, Mike can't shake the feeling that something else - something more is going on. He shakes it off and takes a breath. Everything is fine. You're being dramatic. Mike hopes he's right.

Sunlight streams through the high windows in Kali's office, illuminating the swirling dust motes and captivating her. Anything is better than listening to the loud clicking of the clock, reminding her of a metronome, and the quiet, studious gaze of her doctor. Eleven hates these sessions.

"You've been visiting him again," Kali says. They've been sitting in silence for twelve minutes, and the doctor is the first to speak, as usual. Eleven feels a small thrill of victory before shame; she's been told, many times now, forbidden even, from doing what she's been doing. Shuffling her feet and staring at her hands, Eleven nods her head yes.

"Why do you disobey, Eleven?" Kali's tone isn't mad or disappointed, just steady and professional.

"I... I like to see him." She blushes at the admission, keeping her gaze on her bare feet against the tile floor.

"But Dr Brenner, as well as myself, have told you how dangerous this is. For him." Kali watches, her dark eyes seeming to stare right through her, to read her mind. Maybe she can - after all, Eleven has seen the tattoo on her wrist - 008 - almost identical to her own. Eleven knew there was something about Kali that was like her. She just didn't know what.

"He thinks I'm a dream. That he made up," Eleven whispers. She wants so much to be real, solid and tangible in his life. She wants to do everything they've done in dreams for real. She wants to see if his lips are as gentle and sweet as they look.

"I know it's lonely here, Eleven," Kali says. Her mouth smiles sympathetically but her dark eyes are nothing but studying, watchful. Waiting for her to slip. "Didn't you like the cat?"

"Papa made me kill it," Eleven responds flatly. She doesn't outwardly react, but her stomach roils and churns at the memory.

"Yes, as punishment. You ran away."

"I came back," Eleven says with an eye roll.

Kali sighs and stands, sidling along her hardwood desk to stop in front of Eleven. She squats down to the younger girl's eye level. Eleven raises her gaze from the floor to the doctor, squaring her shoulders. "If you don't begin to cooperate... if you continue on this trend of rebellion," Kali says, low and quiet and threatening as a

freshly sharpened blade, "your Papa will make sure your friend has no more dreams for you to visit. Do you understand?"

A fine tremble takes over her whole body. Eleven is first afraid - the dark haired boy whose dreams she has been invading, whom she is so drawn to despite not knowing him, means everything to her. Since the escape, when Eleven saw him in the woods that surrounding the Lab with other boys but none of them even remotely as fascinating as him - the boy with constellations on his cheeks and tall, long limbs and a smile that made her feel strange but good. She wouldn't let them hurt him. Fear gives way to anger and she clenched her fists, fingernails digging half-moons into her palm.

"Do you understand, Eleven?" Kali repeats.

"Yes." Eleven nods once, then stands. "Are we done?"

That night, in her room, Eleven lays in bed, curled tightly on her side, and closes her eyes. She knows it's stupid, potentially life threatening, but at least she has to say goodbye.

## 2. 2

Before she finds him, Eleven taps in to check on Papa and Dr Kali. They are together in his office, a television stationed on a rolling cart between their chairs. Papa is wearing a crisp suit with a lab coat over top, white hair brushed back. He always looks neat, not a strand out of place, and it only serves to make Eleven feel small, inadequate, and foolish. They haven't shaved her head on a while, and her hair grows to her chin in messy dark curls the color of sweet pudding she gets with dinner when she's good.

She hasn't had pudding in a long time.

In the void, all is black save for the spot light that illuminates the figures and furniture. Kali crosses her arms, watching the grainy, black and white footage of their appointment. Papa strokes a long finger over his chin thoughtfully.

"She's a growing girl," Kali is saying, "she craves attention, physical touch. Affection. This... situation is only a cry for help."

"I don't care about her feelings," Papa says, and Eleven bites her cheek when tears begin to sting her eyes. It's not news, but it doesn't hurt any less. "She needs to focus. There is much to do and she is still woefully ill-prepared. This distraction needs to end."

Tonight, Eleven agrees to herself.

She leaves them then, her mind seeking him out. It takes some time, powers stretching and ebbing as a hot, tacky drip of blood slides out of her left nostril. She pictures his face, the dots on his cheeks and his floppy black hair and pale, soft looking skin. It takes time, but once she senses the dreamscape of his mind, she sighs in relief and lets herself relax.

He's dreaming about his friends - the ones she saw him with in the woods. It was a while ago, but the memory would never leave her. It was the first time she had ever been outdoors. The first time she didn't have someone breathing down her neck. And then she found him, and it was like a piece of her was inside of him, and it made her

feel... whole. Like there was more to life than Papa and Kali and the awful things she was forced to do.

Eleven watches a while, curious about his life and the people in it, putting off the moment she has to end this. It's been her reason for living for so long, it seems...

"Hey! Hey!" His voice is loud and Eleven senses that he's seen her. She's never let him see her face, and begins to quickly hurry down the hallways. This is his dream, she has no idea where they are, but her nerves and the people on the fringes of his consciousness make her edgy. Finally, she finds a room that is empty. She leaves the door open just an inch. He finds her.

"It's you," he says, slamming the door shut behind him. Eleven nods, biting her lip. "You're prettier than I imagined."

Eleven blushes. She's pleased with this.

"I've - always wondered," he admits sheepishly.

"Wondered what?"

"Why I never saw your face. I figured, like, you were some general dream girl my mind invented." He chuckles and steps closer. Eleven can smell him - wintergreen and pencil shavings and clean, like soap - and it makes her tension ease out slowly.

"No. I'm real." Eleven steps towards him, too.

"Ok, sure." He doesn't believe her. Maybe it's better that way? But something inside of her Kong's for him to believe, to know that she's out there, that she will always think of him. "If you're so real, what's your name?"

"They call me Eleven."

He pauses. "That's not a name. That's a number."

She holds out her wrist to show the marking there. "Oh-one-one," she reads out. "Eleven."



He is staring at her, then long fingers wrap around her thin arm and he's squinting like he can't believe it. "No way."

"What do they call you?" She has never dared ask.

"Michael - Mike for short." Eleven thinks that's a nice name.

"Mike."

But then suddenly his lips crush against her and Eleven melts into his arms, letting him pull her tightly against his body so they are flush together. She's wearing a nightgown, a peace offering after the cat incident. It is soft and pink, a color she likes very much, and Mike's fingers bunch the material up as he holds her. Tongues slide in a familiar but surreal dance and she can feel it everywhere - down her thin thighs to her toes and the center of her, where heat pools.

"If you're real," Mike says, breaking the kids but leaning his forehead against her's, breath fanning on her face, "then how are you here?"

"I don't know," Eleven says honestly. She doesn't know the how, just that it does. "I saw you in the woods.. by where I live. You were with boys like you. But I liked you best." She shrugs one shoulder and shivers as his lips go to her ear.

"I don't care," Mike whispers. "Real or not, it doesn't matter. You're here." And then they kiss again, and the fire in her veins is sure to set them aflame. He reaches for the hard part of him, the one that makes him whimper and beg her for more and he whispers Eleven as her hands help him to feel good.

"I can't come back," Eleven says once he's finished and panting against her.

"You have to," Mike replies.

"They want to hurt you. I'm not supposed to be here." Eleven steps back and his hand slides to cup her cheek. Gentle, sweet. Like he... cares.

"I don't care, Eleven." He kisses her forehead and then her lips and Eleven sighs against him, enjoying a feeling she's certain she will

never experience again. "If you're real, come to me. When I'm awake."

"Mike..." How does she explain to him that she can't? That it isn't safe? Something pulls at the edge of her conscious, something is trying to pull her back. "I have to go. Don't forget me, Mike."

"Eleven!"

His voice reverberates in her head and when she opens her eyes, Papa is leaning over her with a frown.

"You've been so bad, Eleven. A very bad girl."

Mike flinches awake, drenched in sweat and his pants sticky. But he's not focused on that, instead the wide doe eyes filled with fear and soft, sweet voice and lips. He's shaking - none of his dreams have ever been like that.

For some reason, he believes her. This dream girl his brain made up - she's too detailed. He's not that creative. He doesn't understand it all, but he senses it's important. He reaches for the closest thing to write on, cursing in the dark as he feels for a pen, and begins to write it all down with an urgency that feels unreal.

Eleven. The tattoo, the way she spoke and what she said. He couldn't have made that up. Mike trembles as he writes, then sits back and re-reads it.

Eleven.

Hurt him.

Scared.

Saw me in woods.

Not supposed to be here.

What does it mean? Where is she? How does she exist?

He changes into clean shorts and lays back in bed with a thumping heart and a sudden indescribable euphoria that has nothing to do

with the orgasm endorphins running through him.

She's real.

### 3. 3

Mike is waiting in the AV room a full half hour before he knows the others will arrive. He's eager to tell them, despite knowing it won't be any easy sell. Many times he shook his head and gathered his things, telling himself he was obviously losing it and desperate to get laid. Still, considering the doubts building up within him, Mike stayed out until Dustin breezed in.

"What are you doing here so early?" He frowns, glances toward the clock in confusion.

"I had a dream. And there was this girl -"

"Whoa, buddy. I don't want to hear about your wet dreams." Dustin is grinning though as he sets about unloading his textbooks and folders. "Though, it is about time. Was starting to worry you were like, asexual or something."

Mike blushes and scowls. "It's not like that - Well, it is, but more than that -"

"I had a dream about that chick from that Duran Duran video-"

"Shut up, dude! I'm trying to tell you something important." Mike can no longer sit still and begins pacing the cramped space. "I've been having dreams about this girl for like, a long time, ok. And I thought they were just dreams and my brain made her up, right? Well, she's real. She talked to me, Dustin. I think..." Mike pauses in his track and sets a serious look at his friend. Dustin's face is inscrutable, but he's not cutting him off and calling him crazy. Yet. "I think she needs help." He swallows thickly, the worry and fear that he's tried to keep down since waking up suddenly choking him.

"Is she hot?" Dustin asks after a moment, and Mike groans.

"You aren't listening to me!"

Will Byers shuffles in at that moment, wide dark eyes seemed permanently ringed with dark circles and coffee thermos in one hand.

He lifts an eyebrow and Dustin shakes his head.

"Our friend is losing it," he supplies with a sigh.

"No, I'm not." Mike is getting angry now, clenching his fists. "This is serious!"

"What's going on?" Will's voice is soft and quiet, kind of like him, but there's concern there too and Mike thinks maybe, if any of his friends are going to believe him, it's Will.

"Mike had a dream about some hottie that told him she was real. And now he's lost his mind. I'm tellin ya, just need to get laid." Dustin smirks down at his chicken-scratch notes as Mike raked his fingers through his hair - it's already become much wilder than normal, sticking up at odd angles. Come to think of it, Will realizes that Mike is wearing the same rumpled clothes from yesterday. This is very unlike him.

"Her name is Eleven," Mike says, edging on desperation as he appeals to Will. "She had a tattoo of it on her arm. A-and she said she saw us in the woods by where she lives! She said they're keeping her somewhere and she can't come back -"

"What, is this like a new campaign?" Max's voice cuts him off and Mike punches the bridge of his nose in frustration. "If so, it sounds crazy cool. Save the princess with a twist. I'm down."

Lucas huffs a laugh as they find a spot together, oblivious to the tense atmosphere. "We haven't played in years," Lucas says. "Aren't we too old?"

"Well first of all, you're never too old to Dungeons and Dragons," Dustin says with authority. "Secondly, no. Mike -"

"I can speak," Mike deadpans with a glare. Dustin gestures for him to do so, and Mike takes a deep breath. Lucas will be the hardest sell, as he's naturally skeptical of everything. Mike doesn't actually care what Max thinks - she's not really part of the party anyway. "Ok, so, I've been having dreams about this girl. For a while. And last night, she finally spoke to me and showed me her face. She told me that her

name is Eleven, that she can't visit my dreams anymore. That whoever is holding her - that if she keeps coming I will be in danger."

It's silent enough to hear a pin drop and Mike's pulse is thundering in his ears. Lucas's face is a mask of calm, unreadable blandness. Max looks intrigued.

"So... what?" Lucas asks.

"So she's real! I have to help her."

"How does any of this make sense?" The y'all, muscular teen glances at his girlfriend and inwardly groans to see that she's eating it up. Max has always been imaginative, but Lucas doesn't approve of her feeding into Mike's craziness.

"I couldn't make this up," Mike says. "Not the name, the tattoo..."

"What kind of tattoo?" Max asks. Her sea-green eyes are alight with curiosity. The bell rings shrilly overhead, it's time for homeroom.

"I gotta go." Lucas moves to the doorway, where students rush in a flurry of voices and color.

"I can't be tardy again," Will agrees.

"Yeah, Mrs Morton will have my ass if I'm late. Sorry Mike." Dustin pats his shoulder and the three teens leave. Mike slumped against the table, defeated. Max is still standing there, backpack hanging on one shoulder and her skateboard tucked under the other arm.

"Aren't you going to be late, too?" Mike snaps.

"Yeah, But fuck PE. This is way cooler." She closes the door and Mike watches, a shocked smile slowly stretching over his lips, as she sets her things down.

"You believe me?"

"No," she says with a shrug. "But I think you do. And I can help."

For the first time ever, Mike thinks that Lucas is truly one lucky

bastard.

"Eleven."

She glances up, eyes bloodshot and puffy from crying. The chamber is small and sterile, nothing like the glimpses she's seen of Mike's bedroom and other places where he lives. They seem warm and cozy, inviting. Her room is a narrow cot and two-way glass so that she may be observed at all times.

Papa is standing in the doorway. He has a box in his hands. Swiping the back of her hand over her cheek, Eleven turns to him.

After last night, he'd left her. In the dark, eery silence. She had cried until she fell asleep, pillow damp and salty. She hadn't dared try to find him again. She never would, if it meant keeping him safe.

"Kali and I have been talking about you. May I sit?" She nods once, though she knows it wouldn't matter if she said no. She didn't truly have a choice.

"Kali says that you are needing to feel... special. That as you've grown, you've come to need more than I have provided for you here." Papa seems uncomfortable and Eleven watches him with wide, confused eyes. She's never seen him act anything other than cold, detached. Even when he tries to act nice, more so when she was younger, but he could not keep up the charade. Now, he seems unsure, almost as uncertain as she feels.

"I'm going to make you a deal, Eleven. I'm going to make an effort to provide some comforts, some luxuries, here for you. And you will no longer seek to explore the world outside." Papa leans towards her, dark eyes hypnotic as he gazes into her face. She has the blank mask in place, revealing nothing. His eyebrows rise and he shoves the box at her. Carefully, Eleven lifts the lid - she doesn't know why she imagines the dead cat will be nestled inside - and gasps softly.

There is a soft pink garment, and Eleven pulls it out with delight. She can't hide her smile, examining the dress.

"I can see that you like it. I've scheduled a special date for you,

Eleven. How would you like a friend?"

It's too good to be true and she realizes it, sagging slightly and frowning at him. Nothing is ever done freely here. He expects something in return. Is it worth it? She gazes at her pretty frock, thinking of how she wishes she could show Mike. Instantly tears prick her eyes and she swallows them back, gulping down her emotions. Can't think of him. Must protect him no matter what.

"Yes, papa." She has no other choice.



## 4. Chapter 4

Eleven has a bad feeling as Papa instructs her to undress and change into the new dress. She follows his orders, sliding the pink material over her slender body. The sleeves are long and there is a white collar, and it hits her above the knee. In the reflection of the one-way glass, she feels... Beautiful. What Mike called her last time. Even though her dark curls are wild and unkempt, and she's barefoot, and she can see the little points of her nipples through the material, she still feels pretty.

"That's a good girl." Papa gives her a smile, but it doesn't reach his eyes, and Eleven knows that something is wrong. A sense of dread slides down her spine, pooling in her stomach and making her palms clammy. This is a punishment wrapped in a pink dress. This is bad. "Now, follow me. I want you to meet someone."

He stands, opens the door and without making sure she is following, exits into the hallway. Her feet feel heavy as she slowly follows. The hallway seems miles long and they walk for what seems like forever until he opens another door and motions for her to enter. Fighting back the fear and anxiety that makes her tremble, Eleven strides inside. There is a one-way mirror of course on the wall opposite the door. A couch, a table and chairs. Kali sits in a chair with a boy. Eleven supposes he must be her age, with a shaved head and light blue eyes that remind her of the sky, that day she escaped. His features are like hers, small and delicate, but the way he's looking at her is hard. Cold.

"Eleven, I would like you to meet Nine. Nine, this is Eleven."

Shock in her eyes as they swing up to Papa's face. Eleven knew that Kali had been like her before, but for some reason hadn't imagined a boy.

"You two are going to become very close friends. Won't that be nice?" Papa smirks. He's looking at her expectantly. Eleven gulps.

"Yes, Papa." She turns again to Nine. He looks like he wants to... what? Eleven doesn't know how to interpret the look in his eyes.

Whatever it is, she knows it's not good.

---

"So, lets start at the beginning. When did you first dream of her?" Max has a sheet of paper and pen poised in one hand. They've picked themselves in the AV room, unspoken agreement that they wouldn't be leaving soon.

Mike paces, rubbing his chin absently. He remembers the dream like it happened only moments ago; lips on his neck, hands on his body, everywhere at once. It was overwhelming and intense, and now that he knew her face he wishes he had seen it then, too. He's struggling to remember when, though.

"I think... it was last year. Around fall?" He tries to remember waking up and succeeds, the erection he's had harder than any previous ones he can remember. He remembers furiously jerking off before his alarm sounded or his mother came knocking. Vaguely, he remembers that he wore only boxers and a T-shirt. Late summer, early fall, then. He leaves out these details, figuring Max doesn't need to know and Lucas might kill him if he was discussing his cock with his girlfriend.

"Ok. So, did you guys go anywhere different last year around this time? Hang out anywhere out of the norm?" Max tucks a loose red curl behind her ear. Mike is shocked that she's so helpful - his mind is a tangle of doubt and worry and confusion about this whole situation. He is worried for Eleven. He's frightened of what they - whoever they are - might do to her. And he's still in a state over the fact that she is real, that she came to him... How did she do any of that? How can she be real?

"We hang around Mirkwood a lot in the end of summer. No ones ever out there." Mike frowns, stroking his chin, deeply in thought. Crunchy leaves under his sneakers, the compass going all wonky. They had figured it was something to do with the device...

"Mirkwood? By Will's?" Max scribbles something down and then stands. "We should get a map. See if we can find anything nearby. But," she pauses, eyes scrunching together, "other than Will's place, all I can think of is the Lab."

She continues rattling on, talking about skipping the whole day and that's fine with her, but Mike is frozen to his seat. Hawkins Lab... The place always gave him the creeps. The big building was fenced off, and there were armed guards patrolling the entrance and perimeter. Dustin had always joked that they probably had some kind of crazy experiments going on there, hence the need for such security and secrecy. Hawkins Lab... it makes sense.

"Max, you're a genius," Mike breathes out.

The redhead pauses and cocks her head to the side. "Thanks, Wheeler. But we already knew this." Her cheeky grin makes him chuckle, and for the first time since waking that morning, Mike feels a little better, a little lighter.

—

Papa leaves her alone with Nine. Eleven nervously fidgets with her dress and stands still as the boy approaches her. No, not boy, she thinks with an internal frown. He's a man - older than her.

"Papa says you're lonely," Nine tells her, and he circles around her. It makes her stomach flop around.

"Papa is your papa, too?"

"All our Papa." He shrugs one shoulder and their eyes meet. He looks hungry, and it frightens her. "He made us. All of us. What can you do?"

Eleven shakes her head. She doesn't want to be here, let alone use her powers. She knows that there are people studying them, hidden cameras and the one-way glass.

"I can start fires," Nine says. He holds out his hand, and a little orange flame dances in his palm. Eleven gasps in surprise. No blood comes from his nose, and she's somewhat envious about that. "Show me yours, Eleven."

She's trembling, but nods. Eleven can't believe that there are more like her, like Kali - and the fact that they're numbers, which come in order, means that there are more too. Are they here? Is Papa keeping

them apart on purpose? Are they locked up in their own cells, littered like broken toys around the building? Or did they escape?

She nods towards the table and chairs. Carefully, she lifts a chair a few inches from the floor before replacing it. Not terribly impressive - not as cool as the fire. But Nine exhales slowly and smiles.

"Our child will be powerful."

Fear is ice that slides down her spine as Eleven realizes what Papa wants from her. What he's brought them together for. Inside, she is screaming.

No! Mike!

—

They made it to the student parking lot without being apprehended and Mike slides behind the wheel as alex stashed her bag and board in the backseat. He knows there's maps in his father's study of the town, and figures they can look them over to make sure the Lab is the closest -

NO! MIKE!

The scream in his head echos and reverberates and he clutches his temples. It's so loud! And he knows that voice, it's her. And she's in danger.

"Shit!" He exclaims. Max squints at him, opening her mouth to ask 'what the fuck' but he waves a hand to silence her. How? How could she be in his head? Hes awake, it's the middle of the day...

"We have to hurry," Mike says, returning shaking hands to the steering wheel. "She's in danger."

MIKE NO MIKE MIKE MIKE

He doubles over, ears throbbing from the volume and the desperation in her voice. His face bumps the wheel and he doesn't even feel it, or Max's hand on his shoulder. He's completely absent of the present.

"I'm getting Lucas! Hold on, Mike!" Max swings out of the car and books it back towards the school. Mike breathes slowly, closing his eyes. The sting of hot tears prick his eyes.

What are they doing to her?

## 5. Chapter 5

Afterwards, Eleven is taken back to her room. Kali is gentle, helping her out of the shredded pink dress, into a fresh hospital gown. Eleven lets her stroke a brush through her hair, wipe the blood away from under her nose. Eleven lays prone and still on the narrow bed, eyes open but unseeing. The older woman is soft, voice low and soothing.

"Next time, it will be better. Nine will be punished, of course. He should have listened." Kali shakes her head, frowning. Eleven ignores her, pretends that she's outside somewhere under an endless blue sky. That Mike is beside her, that his large hands are the ones fussing over her.

"Dr Brenner thinks that a child borne from yourself and Nine could be very special, Eleven. Would you like to be a Mother?" Kali gazes at her, waiting.

Finally, Eleven blinks and rolls into her side, curling into a tight ball. She hurts all over. Her skin burns from the rough, strong fingers of that man and the way he forced his way inside. Everything hurts. Everything feels swollen and bruised. She closes her eyes and quietly, without emotion, says, "I would rather die."

Kali says nothing, but rubs her back for a moment. Then the weight of the bed shifts and Eleven hears the clack of her heels against the tile. With a soft click, the lights go dark and the door locks. Only when she is finally alone does Eleven let the salty, hot tears come. Her entire body shakes with sobs, and she fists her hands in the blankets as she unleashes.

—

"Excuse me! Miss Mayfield!"

Lucas glances up from the silent work the class is doing, working on problems out of their book as their teacher marks yesterday's tests at her desk. Max skids to a stop in the front of the room - her eyes are wide, panicked, a turbulent sea of blue-green, and her wild copper hair flashes under the fluorescent lighting overhead.

"It's Mike," she says breathlessly.

"Maxine! This is not your class. Where is your hall pass?"

Max doesn't seem to hear the teacher as she stumbles to Lucas' desk, trembling hands on his shoulder. Instantly, the realization that she's not messing with him, this isn't some elaborate prank, sets in and he grabs his books and starts shoving them in his bag.

Mike is going through /something/ and while Lucas has been somewhat annoyed by this, guilt makes him move quicker. Obviously, he's gotten Max worked up, and that in turn makes Lucas worked up, too. They ignore the indignant teacher as they race out of the classroom, Max's clammy palm against his.

"What happened?" Lucas asks as their feet pound against the ground.

"We were going to Mirkwood - don't look at me like that," Max snaps. "I was trying to help!"

Lucas rolls his coffee-brown eyes. "By indulging in his fantasy?" They burst through the double doors into the cool, crisp fall morning. The sun is bright overhead. They trot to Mike's car, where he's hanging on the steering wheel with one hand and grabbing his head with the other. Tears track down his flushed, splotchy face. He looks - Lucas is reluctant to admit - completely wrecked. Heartbroken.

"Mike, what happened?" Max falls to her knees inside the open car door, her voice gentle and hands hovering like she doesn't know if or how to comfort him. Lucas feels a pinch of jealousy - usually these two bickered like cats and dogs. Seeing his girlfriend concerned for Mike feels unnatural.

"I couldn't save her," Mike says. His voice is so quiet, so defeated.

"Is this about Eleven then?" Lucas shakes his head at his girlfriend and best friend. "You got me out of class for /this/, Max? Really?"

She scowls at him. "Something is obviously happening to /your/ friend. Maybe you should be more worried about whatever mental breakdown he's having?"

Mike glares at both of them. "Don't you get it? Someone was / hurting/ her. Someone is keeping her prisoner and hurting her! I have to do something!" He bangs his fist against the steering wheel. Max grabs his arm.

"We will, Mike. But if they're capable of hurting her like that - of holding her there - we need a plan." She shares a Look with Lucas, cocking her head towards Mike and widening her eyes meaningfully.

"Right. We can't just bust in without a plan." At least this will buy them some time, Lucas hopes. They can get his parents involved. Get him the help he needs. With renewed determination, Lucas nudges Mike over. "I'll drive."

Mike gazes at him, dark eyes swimming with tears. "You believe me? You're really going to help?" For a horrifying second, Lucas can't speak. He's never seen Michael Wheeler look so hopeful and so forlorn at the same time. He hasn't seen him cry since the first time they watched E.T. as kids. Worry pings in his heart, and he nods.

"Yeah, man. Let's get your girl."